

THE RIGHT FIT

A SHORT ANIMATED FILM

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY

ZACHARY A. CRAW

JAMES A. BEANE

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY, 2012

I. **Statement of the Problem**

As a growing artist, animation always caught my attention, even at an early age. At that time I did not necessarily consider it art, but it was definitely something that inspired me as an artist. I can recall obsessively drawing cartoon and video game characters without really thinking about the implications or impact it would have on my later artwork. Animation has been around for quite some time. At its most primitive state, animation can be dated back to Paleolithic cave paintings and Egyptian burial chamber murals. The animation was comprised of a succession of figures that would depict a story by creating the illusion of motion. The Zoetrope is another early form of animation that can be dated back to 180 AD. It was generally a cylindrical device that was hung over a lamp, lit and moved by the heat. As with the cave and mural paintings, there was a succession of images that created the illusion of movement. When the cylindrical carousel is spun, the images will trick the eye by creating the optical illusion of image movement. Despite the fact that animation has been around since Paleolithic times, it seems it has a difficult time being seen as a viable art form alongside more traditional forms of art such as painting and sculpture. Animation artists seem to face many of the

same problems photography and video artists have had being regarded as artists making an acceptable and marketable form of art alongside more traditional forms of art.

As an animator and artist, I look at all things past and present for inspiration in my work. This is inclusive of the aforementioned primitive Paleolithic forms of animation and other traditional forms of art, as well as more contemporary painters, video artists, authors, etc. There are many artists that influence my work that are trained in traditional forms of art and create animation as well. Most of these artists, such as Jan Švankmajer, have been creating animation since the 1960's. The concept of animation is by no means a new one and should be respected just as any other form of art. I consider the how my influences have handled their medium as I attempt to make a connection between my animation and more tradition forms of art such as painting.

II. Review of Influences/Literature

There have been many experiences, events, and people that have influenced how and why I create art today. The artists that influence my work in general are varied, with some having vast experiences in animation, while others have almost nothing to do with animation at all. For me, influence can come from anything, whether it is visual reference or merely the emotive qualities behind an artist's work. David Lynch, for example, is by no means an animator, but rather a film director. Lynch's films are comprised of elaborate, dark, and mysterious landscapes of ambiguous narrative inhabited by characters that share a comparable feeling. Lynch also ventured into rudimentary forms of animation early on as a painter. Lynch wanted to see his painting move in a way they could not naturally do on their own. From this idea, Lynch created a short film entitled *Six Men Getting Sick Six Times*. The film consisted of exactly that. In a very similar process to William Kentridge's animated charcoal eraser drawings, Lynch created the illusion of movement with an additive process of applying paint in increments and recording frames in between. When played back, the six men would appear to be expelling red paint from their mouths.

David Lynch

Despite starting early on with animation, which was not what he intended to pursue later on in his artistic career, Lynch began to segue right into cinema. David Lynch was very much a film director. Not that there should be a clear distinction between film and animation, because the two go hand-in-hand, they are simply two ways of dealing with the medium of video. Lynch's film became more focused on narrative and enigmatic characters while dropping the use of animation altogether. For me, Lynch is one of the most effective artists when it comes to encapsulating and instilling ranges of human emotion. What I like about Lynch's films are their ability to deal with a lot of the things we would consider taboo. He makes you think and feel about the things in life we tend to ignore or pretend do not exist. I would argue that Lynch's film, *Mulholland Drive*, has one of the most emotionally charged scenes out of all his other films. In the scene Lynch has a character participating in the depraved act of self-gratification, while in a state of crying and self-loathing shame. To me, this speaks volumes about the character and the turmoil the character is going through. Not many directors are bold enough to depict such raw human emotion and depravity in the ways that Lynch does. For me, these emotions are very real, and I by no means want to ignore them. A lot of my work reflects the same ideas that Lynch portrays in his work.

David Firth

David Firth is a contemporary animator that uses a program called Adobe Flash to create his body of works. Firth's influences are very similar to my own, and it is most evident in his work. He borrows heavily from the eerie and ambiguous styles of David

Lynch, Jan Švankmajer, The Brothers Quay, and many others. He is most famous for his short animated series *Salad Fingers*. The story revolves around a young boy with, as the title of the animation suggests, salad for fingers. The protagonist, if you will, is borderline schizophrenic and talks to puppets on his fingers. At one point, he lures a small child into his home, to which he proceeds to shove into an oven to be cooked alive during a schizophrenic blackout. A good majority of Firth's work has a sense of dark humor about it. The humorous aspects of his animations are due partly to the cartoony style in which everything is presented. The humorous style seems to counterbalance the shocking and morbid imagery that Firth conjures up.

Jan Švankmajer

Jan Švankmajer is a Czech animator born in 1934. He is a surrealist filmmaker and artist who directs cinema and animation. Švankmajer is best known for his interpretation of Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a full-length feature following the tales of Alice in an eerie, dream-like state. Švankmajer was also known for his animated short film called *Dimensions of Dialogue*, which consisted of three separate animations that dealt with the concepts of human emotions, relationships, and etiquettes. Švankmajer's latest animated short is entitled *Food*, a series of films that served as a political allegory. Švankmajer's animation is accomplished by the process of stop-motion photography. What I find great about his work is the almost crude way in which it is executed, leaving much of the process viewable in the final film. I tend to find this to be an appealing aesthetic and I attempt to do the same in my own work.

Švankmajer also tends to depict eccentric and almost disturbing characters that tend to be

exaggerated caricatures of people. Their appearance and mannerisms are so exaggerated they almost come off as comedic, despite their unsettling presence on screen. After watching a few shorts by Švankmajer, it is quite easy to see the influence he has had with artists such as the Quay Brothers and David Firth.

William Kentridge

William Kentridge is a South African artist well known for his political charcoal drawing animations. I can relate my work to Kentridge in many ways. His work is very much about the conceptual as well as the visual. Kentridge's content driven work is animated by a process of drawing an image with charcoal, taking a single picture, erasing part of the drawing, redrawing the next frame of movement, then taking another picture. He does this several hundred times until the sequence of still frames are brought together to create the illusion of movement and animation. The process of the work and drawing is very visible throughout the duration of his films. Because the medium of charcoal cannot be completely erased, the viewer is able to see trace remnants of the frames that came before. This visual quality almost serves as a physical representation to the passing of time, as well as a reminder of the process in which the film was made. It is important that viewers see my work just as organic despite its digital format. My animated films are painstakingly crafted by hand, much like any other form of traditional art.

Yoshiro Kimura

Yoshiro Kimura is a Japanese artist and video game director that has been producing games since 1997 when he worked on *Moon: Remix RPG Adventure*. What

makes Kimura such an inspiration is his knack for creating subtly dark and depressing characters and worlds that are deceptively shrouded in cuteness and brightly candy-colored landscapes. Kimura's stories cover the concepts of love and social hierarches and how they can impact our lives. This is most evident in Kimura's games *Chulip* and *Little King's Story*. The protagonist of *Chulip* is an impoverished young boy who has moved to a new town. Most of the townspeople will have nothing to do with the boy, and some are even quick to point out his financial short comings. In *Little King's Story*, there are several suggestions of adults facing situations such as alcoholism and unsuccessful single, middle-aged men with regrets of squandered youth. Kimura satires religion in his games as well. In *Little King's Story* a priest named Kampbell presents himself to ask "Do you believe in God?" as a preface to demanding a large sum of money to construct a church. Kampbell quickly responds "God will punish you if you don't!". I rather like the subtle dark overtones in Kimura's work and I try to implement them into my own.

These are just a few of the artists that influence my work. They cover a range of mediums, including Photography, Painting, Filmmaking, and Sculpture. Something these artists all have in common is that they incorporate their own styles and mediums to create animation. The medium of animation is by no means a new one, and it should be equally respected as a form of art. These are the things I consider when creating my own work, as I look at all types of artists and the world around me as I develop my concepts and visual design.

III. Description of the Artwork

In creating *The Right Fit*, I have a film that explores roles in gender and the relationships between man and woman. This is a theme that I often represent in my work, which is also reflected by the artists that are influential to me. The narrative follows a young boy born from the earth, with the sole objective of seeking out his female counterpart. The creation of the boy parallels the manner in which God creates Adam. The difference is the boy is born from the tree of life as opposed to Adam being formed from the dust of the ground. The female is assumed to have been born from the earth as well, as she idly waits on top of the hill, perched by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The distinction here is that the female is not created from the rib of man, but exists independently from man. The boy must overcome the harsh obstacles that are thrown his way before finally reaching the girl. Along the way, he becomes aware of his nudity and the apparent need for clothing. This realization is important because the boy comes to this conclusion before coming to the girl; this is not something that happened as a result of the girl. There are some sexual overtones that relate to the ideas of masculinity and femininity and the roles each partner plays in a romantic relationship. The Boy is in possession of a key, a phallic symbol representing the characters masculinity. The Girl

has a keyhole in the navel region. The idea of the key and the keyhole stands to represent the idea of a monogamous relationship where The Boy's key can only fit one hole, the only hole for which his key was made. Upon reaching the girl, the boy instinctively draws his phallic key and places it into the lock-shaped orifice in the girl's stomach. The couple faces one more challenge before reaching their conclusion. Roots from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil violently pull the boy into the ground, where he could presumably suffocate and become one with the earth again. It is up to the female to save the young boy. By doing so, it is established that the girl is just as capable as the boy, and in fact, the boy owes his life to her. The girl proceeds to pull a dried dandelion out of her stomach before rescuing the boy from peril and drifting to safety. The dandelion and its seeds are symbolic of how the male and female will once again touch back down to the earth and the reproductive cycle will come full circle.

The concept and visual aesthetic of the film was derived from many ideas and influences. This is inclusive of several artists as well as the applications that were chosen to create the animation. The following will attempt to explain the concepts behind the animation and the process in which it was created.

Stylistically, the animation takes visual cues from several sources. The beautiful two-dimensional animation of early Disney films has always been a strong influence on my work. Many of the early Disney techniques are the same I use as animate techniques. Disney animations such as Snow White and the Seven Dwarves relied on a technique referred to as rotoscoping to capture fluid, life-like animation. The process of rotoscoping involves taking frames of real-life reference and translating them into individually drawn

frames of animation. A modern example of this would be recording an actress dancing, then taking each frame of video and drawing it by hand. Once the individual frames are shown in sequence, the drawings will create the illusion of movement as the drawings mimic the dancing figure in the video.



Behind the scenes of *Sleeping Beauty*, ©Disney

This can be a very tedious process, as there are typically 24 to 30 still frames in a single second of animation and film. This method helps facilitate the ideas and methods mentioned in the influences section. Rotoscoping is a process very similar to the one Kentridge used in his animated charcoal drawings.

The short animated film is primarily created with the use of Adobe Photoshop, Adobe After Effects, and Corel Painter. This specific set of software was used to achieve the animation created in a style that appeals to me. Adobe Photoshop and Corel Painter are very similar pieces of software chosen for very specific purposes. As mentioned, much of what I find appealing about any artistic expression is the actual process of using a medium and how that process is evident to the viewer, like the eraser charcoal drawings of William Kentridge. When the process is evident to the viewer it tells a bit of a story on its own. Corel Painter is a piece of software that helps achieve this in a digital format.

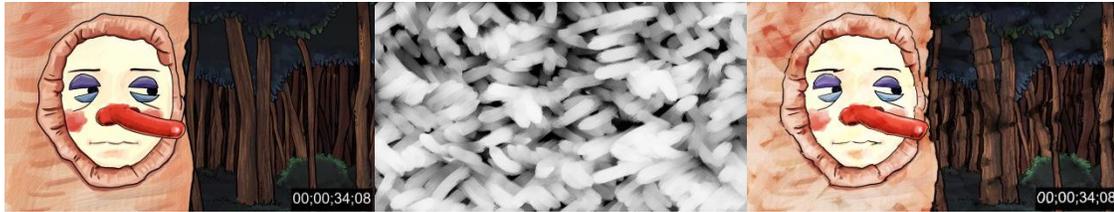
Corel Painter has a myriad of mediums, surfaces, and brushes and emulates the organic mediums such as; oil paint, marker, watercolor, charcoal, and conte crayon in a digital format.

For this animated film, I have chosen to use a thick oil paint medium to create the colorful worlds my characters inhabit. An inspiration for the visual style comes from Yoshiro Kimura's *Little King's Story*. *Little King's Story* is loosely based off of the book entitled *The Little Prince* by the French author, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The whimsical visual qualities of the cinematics in this game inspired my attempt to create a colorful world depicted in a painterly style using the brushes found in Corel Painter.



Little King's Story ©2009 Marvelous Entertainment Inc.

I have also utilized Corel Painter to create a series of black and white paints of nothing but brush strokes. This series of paints was used as a displacement in Adobe After Effects so that the short animated film will appear to have a constantly agitated appearance, almost as if every frame was hand-painted. This, again, has made the medium very apparent to the viewer.

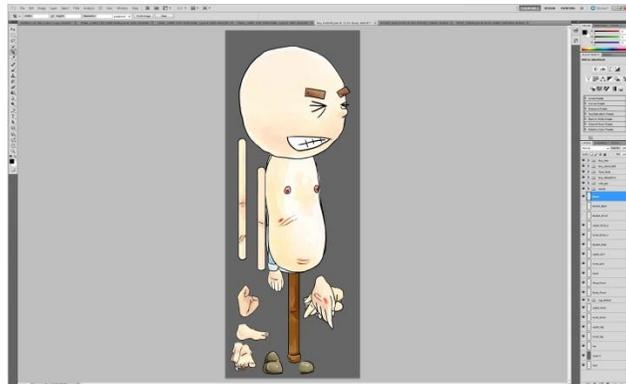


No affect added.

Displacement.

With affect.

Adobe Photoshop was used for drawing the outlines of characters, backgrounds, and props. Adobe Photoshop lacks the ability to easily simulate the qualities of a medium such as oil paint, but it allowed me to draw quickly and effectively with clean lines, a quality that Corel Painter lacks. Adobe Photoshop also makes editing layers and compositioning an intuitive process. Because of this, the work flow was very much a simple exchange between Adobe Photoshop and Corel Painter. The layers created in Adobe Photoshop are ideal for a workflow involving Adobe After Effects, as the software operates strictly in a series of layers.



The Boy layers in Adobe Photoshop.

The character design was strongly influenced by artist Ryuji Nouguchi, who did the character design for *Chulip*. I was particularly attracted to the simplistic design of the two main characters because they have simplified geometric forms that are easily animated. The character's bodies are torsos with almost no pelvic area and skinny legs attached at the bottom. The proportions of the characters are similar to the conventions of

most children's cartoons. They have large heads, eyes, feet, and hands that can be used for exaggerated movements and expressions. I also used aspects of the Japanese Tengu mask in my character design. The male tree character has a phallic nose that is similar to the nose of the Tengu. This phallic symbol is one of several reoccurring sexual innuendos throughout the animated film.

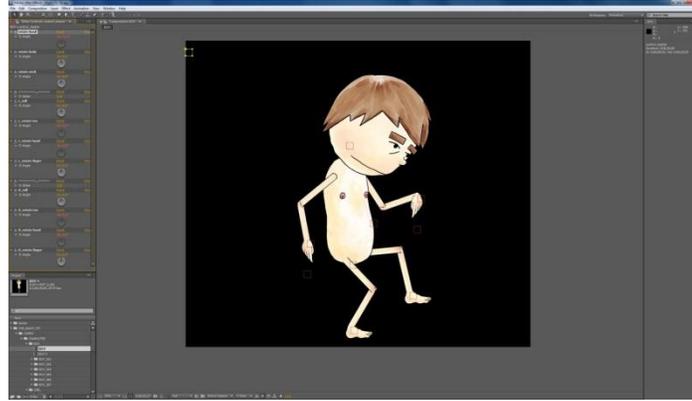


Characters from *Chulip*, ©2007 Punchline



Tengu mask.

The animated short film was primarily animated in Adobe After Effects. The characters were rigged using a script called 'RigIt'. The script gives the characters a skeleton that uses IK (inverse kinematics) joints, which allowed me to manipulate the characters like a puppet. The rig also allowed me to get foot and toe rolls for walk cycles, bend the knees and elbows using IK joints, and get full control of the neck and head movement, as well as a spine rotation. The rig is simple, but effectively allowed me to execute complicated animations.



The Boy character rig in After Effects.

The total running time of the film will be approximately four minutes and fifteen seconds long. The title of the film, *The Right Fit*, was chosen because it summarizes the relationship pursued by the Boy and Girl characters. In the beginning life is created. The Boy is introduced to the world and must embark on a journey. The Boy travels through the dark and perilous forest to reach the love of his life. During his journey, he discovers the key to unlocking true love. The key the Boy uses fits perfectly within the keyhole in the navel of the Girl. This is to suggest that they were made for each other from the start, as they were meant only for each other. They are the right fit.

IV. Conclusion

The art of animation is a cumulative process of research and observation. Animators, like any artist, are influenced by others and the world around them. A digital artist must learn many of the same concepts that traditional artists would, such as lighting, color theory, form, and composition. Many of these universal principles have been used in animation for hundreds of years. Traditional artists such as William Kentridge, Salvador Dali, and Man Ray have incorporated animation into their own work. Kentridge worked with charcoal and a series of eraser drawings. Dali has worked with Disney to incorporate his paintings into an animated short called *Destino*. Ray directed *Emak-Bakia*, a film that incorporates Ray's techniques of photography with elements of animation. Contemporary artists such as filmmakers David Lynch, Brothers Quay, and Jan Švankmajer have all produced animated films while still continuing to work with more traditional mediums. Lynch started as a painter and photographer and continues to pursue these types of mediums in addition to film and animation. The Brothers Quay are trained illustrators and work with the medium of sculpture to incorporate concepts into their films. Švankmajer has always incorporated his masterful talents working with clay sculpture into his animated works.

With many of the artists that have been involved with animation, it would be difficult to make a strong distinction between a painter, sculptor, and an animator. They share a lot of the same fundamentals and principles in design. It has been my goal as an artist to achieve a standard where there is no distinction. I very much appreciate and enjoy more traditional and tangible forms of art, but am always looking for ways to include these mediums, influences, and principles into animated work.

Artist's Statement

The Right Fit is an animated short film that follows a young boy from the beginning of life to the discovery of his true love. The protagonists of the film are challenged and aided by nature itself. Watch as the boy travels through dangerous, dark woods as he discovers the meaning of love with the girl he was meant to be with.

Much of this film is inspired by an assortment of artists, such as William Kentridge, David Lynch, and Jan Švankmajer. The visual presentation takes many cues from aforementioned artists and how they handle their own works in animation. This results in creating a piece that puts an emphasis on the mediums and techniques that were used. Every loving stroke of the hand is intently apparent and exists for the viewer to see.

The animation was created using the programs Adobe Photoshop, Adobe After Effects, and Corel Painter 12. Creating the animation was a process of drawing and painting in Photoshop and Corel Painter. The characters and backgrounds were fully posed and animated in After Effects. The visual style can be attributed to artists like Yoshiro Kimuara and his candy-colored works like *Chulip* and *Little King's Story*. Conceptually, The Right Fit borrows ideas found in the *Bible*, specifically in Genesis.

The story also has its roots in Japanese culture and artists like David Lynch and David Firth. These varied arrays of influences are the ingredients for this strange and whimsical tale of a boy finding true love.

The intention is to take all of these influences to create a compelling story, while incorporating the roots and fundamentals of animation that have been around for hundreds of years and combine them with the same principles and concepts of traditional artists. By doing so, hopefully this will eliminate any distinction between animation and fine art.